DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 198 981 RC 012 541

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TITLE Development of Rural Cooperatives.
PUB DATE 10 Nov 80
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented to the Rural Small School Education Conference (Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, November 10-11, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; Career Exploration; Centralization; *Cooperative Programs; *Education Service Centers; Program Descriptions; Program Design; *Program Development; *Rural Education; School Districts; Secondary Education; *Shared Services; Skill Development; Student Transportation; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS Minnesota (Red Lake Falls); *Pine to Prairie Cooperative Center MN

ABSTRACT

The 61 cooperative vocational centers in Minnesota are joint efforts of 2 or more neighboring school districts to provide secondary vocational education and to strengthen, extend and expand existing vocational programs. Begun as pilot projects in 1968, the centers focus on introducing students to a variety of occupations, providing career exploration, and providing basic skills for employment, as well as some preparation for post-secondary college or technical programs. Cooperative centers, called "area schools" in some parts of the country, are usually centralized for cost effectiveness. The centers are usually established by local advisory committees working with district administrators to formalize the center's establishment and to select, place, and publicize the center. Administrators select a vocational administrator, who in most states is required to have a vocational education background. The centers generally use the simulated method of job training and operate two or three hours per day. Students enroll in their home districts and take courses in both the home school and the center. Pine to Prairie Cooperative Center, one of the two original Minnesota projects, now serves 13 school districts. The center's staff of 75 provides vocational courses to over 1500 students, including some disadvantaged and handicapped students. (SB)

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# DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COOPERATIVES

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There are many types of high school cooperative vocational programs in the United States. The term cooperative should not be confused with cooperative education where students have on the job experience, but should instead be thought of as cooperative ventures between two or more school districts to provide vocational and other selected programming for students.

Some states are organized on a county by county system where each county has built an area vocational center which serves high school students and some part time adult students, perhaps from CETA programs. Others have set up cooperative centers by local initiative with school districts choosing to work together in self selected groupings.

In the state of Minnesota a cooperative center, formerly titled vocational center, is a joint effort among neighboring school districts to provide secondary vocational education and other K-12 and adult education by option of that center board. The center receives approval from the State Board of Education and is designated to serve individuals of the member districts that compose the center. Students choose vocational programs or other elective programs on the basis of individual selection and vocational counseling with students closest to leaving high school served first.

A cooperative center is intended to strengthen and extend existing programs and to provide an opportunity to expand offerings to include additional vocational preparation. A student enrolls at their home district and participates in the program administered by the independent district and the cooperative center. Students, staff or equipment can be

Prepared for: The Rural Small School Education Conference, Kansas State University, November 10-11, 1980



RC 012541

transported based upon the decisions by the governing board. The most common arrangement is that students are transported for up to one half hour (25 miles) daily to a central location. This is because the costs of equipping up-to-date laboratories are great and therefore laboratories need to be centralized. Also, many small schools do not have enough students to make up a class of feasible size. The student is granted high school credit for education obtained through the center by their home school district.

The cooperative centers are different from post-secondary vocational technical institutes which gear their programs to post-secondary students with the objective being employment upon graduation. At the high school level, importance is placed upon introducing students to a variety of occupations, providing career exploration, and providing basic skills for employment.

A cooperative center is different from the comprehensive high school in that it represents a sharing between two or more districts for offering vocational programs. Comprehensive high schools may still offer lead-in courses and vocationally oriented and vocationally reimbursed courses particularly in the areas of home economics, business education or agriculture. Adult vocational education may also be offered. The adult courses may be long-term such as Adult Farm Management or Small Business Management or short-term upgrading.

The goals and objectives of a vocational cooperative center may vary somewhat due to possible differences in advisory committees, administration, types of program offering, socio-economic characteristics of the communities being served and other differences. Generally, the objectives of secondary vocational programs are defined as follows:

a. To explore occupations in depth,

b. To prepare for entry into full time or part time employment, and

c. To prepare to succeed more quickly in a related post-secondary occupational program at a college or technical institute.

Local school districts objectives may include the sharing of dollars and students to make a larger variety of secondary vocational programs and other types of education available to students than would be possible at the local level and to serve as a catalyst to elementary and junior high school career exploration programs.

Articulation of competencies gained at the secondary level is playing an increasingly important role as students move from secondary to post-secondary education and utilize a competency based curriculum.

Most secondary vocational centers, or area schools as they may be called in some parts of the country, meet for two or three hours a day with some also providing the academic component for students. Methods of job training used in rural areas will usually be the simulated method where students simulate actual job situations in classrooms or laboratories. If there is a sufficient population base the cooperative method, where students receive on the job training, may be used. Frequently shadowing experiences where students have some on the job experience in an unpaid situation work well in rural areas. The type of program planning is very often determined by the local advisory committees.

Programs are selected on the basis of surveys of community members, employers, students, parents, as well as future job trends. The steering committee from the interested schools works together with the administrators in

program selection, placement of programs, and publicity of the center effort within the communities. A formal agreement is usually required. This may take the form of development of an intermediate district, a special local school district, a joint agreement under a joint powers act, or another type of legislation that has been passed at the state level.

The superintendents from the cooperating districts or governing board will select a vocational administrator to work with formulation of the center. The certification of this individual varies from state to state, but usually requires a vocational education background supported by educational administration and vocational administration courses.

There have been many parallels to the cooperatives that we are dealing with in education, whether they are large or small. The dramatic success stories of the REA's and the Tennessee Valley Authority are very well known. The small successes of cooperative ventures, whether in education, in businesses or between people, could also be well documented. As a vocational director who has worked extensively with cooperative education, I would term our Minnesota Cooperative Centers as successful.

## HISTORY OF THE PINE TO PRAIRIE COOPERATIVE CENTER

In 1968, a new concept was put to the test in Minnesota in a pilot program, vocational centers (now called cooperative centers). Under this program, a group of school districts were allowed to voluntarily band together to provide secondary vocational education. Red Lake Falls, Oklee, Mentor, Erskine and Plummer, located in Northern Minnesota, formed the third center in the state, the East Polk-Red Lake County Vocational Center, beginning in the fall of 1969. The success of this effort is shown in the growth of cooperative centers in Minnesota and in the growth of this center. From the two pilot programs in Minnesota in 1968, the number of centers has grown to 61 in 1980. The East Polk-Red Lake County Center reformed with three schools in 1972 and has grown to thirteen school districts with vocational programs located in five shared sites in 1980.

The first center programs included personal service occupations, auto mechanics and model office occupations. These courses were followed by programs in building trades, cooperative sharing of vocational consumer homemaking, and programs in education and child care careers courses. The next areas added included occupational foods and vocational special needs followed by vocational work experience and cooperative business and office education. All of these courses were enhanced by local district lead-in courses which were vocationally reimburseable.

In the fall of 1976, the center school district began meeting with additional school districts, eventually leading to ten districts in the spring of 1978. The center name was changed to the Pine to Prairie Cooperative Center. As of spring 1980, total enrollments for the ten schools in two hour classes totaled 437, one hour classes totaled 616 and one hour for one semester classes totaled 1094. This amounts to approximately 1.67

vocational courses per student. Staff members receiving some vocational funding totaled over 51.

In February of 1980, three additional school districts joined the cooperative center bringing the total to thirteen, the largest outstate cooperative in Minnesota. During the first semesters of 1980, over 1500 students were taking 2062 vocational courses along with 518 students served by special needs support services, placement services, work experience and vocational technical tutors. Disadvantaged students served total 849 and handicapped total 114. Included in the enrollment are 88 minority students, 85 of which are Native American. There are currently 75 certified vocational staff members.

PINE TO PRAIRIE COOPERATIVE CENTER #985

## PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy of the Pine to Prairie Cooperative Center is based on the belief that all people, regardless of their interests, deserve an equal opportunity to pursue a career.

Provision of a usuable education is a public responsibility in a society which places great value upon the optimum development of each individual and depends on the maximum contribution of each citizen to maintain and extend our free system of government.

The primary objectives of the instructional program at the Center are to assist students with basic skills in preparing for immediate employment, explore vocational-technical career classes and prepare for post-secondary training in occupations requiring varying levels of educational preparation. The Center program includes selecting and organizing secondary learning experiences which aim to prepare the learner in terms of his or her capacity for satisfying and effective participation in family, job and community life. The preparation involves development in specific skills and knowledge necessary for successful entry into an occupational field and for acquiring a foundation for subsequent additional training.

The task of the Center is to provide a proper environment, staff, equipment and facilities in which students can acquire experience, knowledge, skills, ideals, attitudes, understandings and appreciations necessary for a satisfying and productive life in a democratic society.

## OBJECTIVES

1. To provide meaningful knowledge--that which can be put to productive use.

2. To provide an atmosphere in which students can explore and evaluate their interests, capabilities and aptitudes for a specific career.

3. To provide the student with a new opportunity for educational success as well as a sense of relativity to education in general.

4. To broaden the scope of secondary education in the schools participating in the Center program by serving as an extension of occupational classrooms for each member school.

5. To establish and enlarge the potential of the individual student through education in knowledge, skills and attitudes which will be useful to him and to his employer.

6. To equip the student with the ability to think creatively and engage in practical occupational experiences to further develop an interest in the welfare of mankind.

7. To provide students with the background necessary to enter vocational-technical education programs at an advanced level.

8. To provide specific trade and occupational training accompanied by desirable personal attitudes and work habits.

## RESOURCES

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